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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4097
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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, EUR; PARIS FOR DEA

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TAGS: [MO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#)

SUBJECT: SPANISH AMBASSADOR ON WESTERN SAHARA, MIGRATION,
ISLAMISTS

REF: A. RABAT 539

[1](#)B. RABAT 308

[1](#)C. RABAT 484

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Over lunch March 20, Spanish Ambassador Planas Puchades told Ambassador Riley that Spain continued to encourage Morocco to produce a credible autonomy plan for the Western Sahara. He dismissed alleged splits within the Polisario, suggesting the recently emerged faction "Line of Martyrs" seemed to be made up of disgruntled or former Polisario members living in the Canary Islands, and "it is not significant." Planas pointedly did not reiterate Spanish concern about Van Walsum's remarks on pulling the Security Council back from the Sahara dispute or US interest in downsizing MINURSO. On migration, Planas expressed disappointment with Algeria's apparent decision not to participate in the July regional conference in Rabat, which Planas said enjoyed EU buy-in. Planas was interested in a recent International Republican Institute (IRI) poll that appeared in the March 18 issue of Moroccan weekly Le Journal, which indicated strong support for Morocco's Islamist party. The conversation touched briefly on the upcoming NATO High-level event in Rabat, Spanish investment in Morocco, and narcotics. End Summary.

Western Sahara

[1](#)2. (C) Continuing a series of reciprocal lunches, Spanish Ambassador Planas Puchades hosted Ambassador Riley and Polcouns to lunch at the Spanish residence on March 20. Planas was accompanied by his new DCM and previously Spanish Ambassador in Nigeria, Alfonso Portabales, who had arrived in Morocco the previous week.

[1](#)3. (C) Planas said the GOS was following with great interest the King's much-anticipated visit to Western Sahara (March 20-25; see ref A). Ambassador Riley noted we were also following the visit with interest. Planas said Spain's primary message to Morocco at this point was one he believed we shared: Morocco should present a credible autonomy plan. Planas said Spain would need to review the plan before taking

a position on it, but in the meantime the GOS was providing "comfort and support" to the GOM to produce a serious plan. Planas was somewhat dismissive of the consultation process with Moroccan political parties, saying he understood the parties' meetings with Palace advisor Mohamed Moatassim were "not really an exchange." He said, nevertheless, that conferences such as that held by the PJD and FC several weeks ago (Ref B) "were okay." Planas said the Spanish have been clear with Morocco that the autonomy plan must be concrete and not conservative. Ambassador Riley said this was a key US message as well.

¶4. (C) Planas said the reported split within the Polisario (the so-called Ligne de Martyrs, or Line of Martyrs) was not significant. These were mostly individuals based in the Canary Islands. While the split itself was not significant, Planas believed there was growing frustration in Tindouf, but it might not be related solely to pressure for negotiation. Planas noted that the Polisario cause continued to resonate with Spaniards, who visited Tindouf in large numbers every year as families back in Spain opened their doors to 5000-10,000 Sahrawis for home stays.

¶5. (C) Planas did not echo GOS concern about the possible backing off of the Western Sahara conflict by the Security Council as advocated by UN Envoy Van Walsum; nor he did express concern about a possible MINURSO drawdown.

Migration

¶6. (C) Planas said there continued to be good cooperation between Morocco and Spain on migration issues, especially after the unfortunate deaths on the frontiers of the Spanish enclaves last fall. Planas said the GOS was pleased Morocco

had announced it was holding a regional conference on migration in Rabat in July, but he regretted that Algeria had apparently decided not to participate (he actually said Algeria's non-participation was "dangerous.") on the ground that the AU was already organizing migration conferences. The Rabat conference, Planas said, enjoyed solid support from France and the EU, as well as Spain. He was concerned about the growth of trafficking networks in the region, noting that some migrants bought "travel packs" (a package of movements -- by road, car, ship, with a series of handlers at each phase -- to get one to the desired destination), which from his information cost thousands of dollars, with no certainty that one would ever reach the destination.

Islamists

¶7. (C) Planas had read with interest recent coverage in Moroccan weekly Le Journal of an "American poll" on Moroccan political attitudes (the poll was conducted by the International Republican Institute but was not intended to be shared with the press; according to IRI, one of political parties that had helped with the poll likely leaked it. Full details and embassy analysis of the results can be found in Ref C). Planas said the results, purporting to forecast a likely PJD victory in the 2007 parliamentary elections, were very interesting. Planas said even if it won many seats the PJD probably would not be able to govern without a coalition. Other political parties are being slow to democratize, Planas said; their leaders are old and there is little dynamism in the ranks. The PJD seems to be following the Erdogan path, he added (see Ref C).

NATO High-Level Event

¶8. (C) Planas raised Morocco's hosting of the upcoming NATO High-Level Event (April 6-7 in Rabat) and said it was an important event for Morocco, especially as it followed the meeting of NATO and Med Dialogue Defense Ministers in Taormina in February. Planas added that the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Moroccan Armed Forces was also a showcase

event for Morocco, and he hoped the US would participate robustly. (Comment: we are firming up a robust US participation in the 50th Anniversary of the FAR celebrations and have tentatively secured a DV embarkation onboard a U.S. aircraft carrier as part of the event. End Comment). Ambassador Riley thanked Planas for Spanish support for the recent planning conference for an upcoming exercise, Phoenix Express, which brought together Moroccan, Algerian, and Spanish naval officers for a week in Rabat.

Spanish Investment

¶9. (C) Ambassador Riley noted Spain's announcement in February of a 200 million Euro plan to facilitate small and medium-sized enterprises in Morocco. (Spain is Morocco's second largest investor). Planas said he hoped the plan would assist Spanish enterprises but said Morocco remained a challenging place to do business given lack of transparency. In terms of providing aid to Morocco Ambassador Riley said there ought to be better coordination among donors and suggested small meetings for donors for specific regions in Morocco, not for all programs in the whole country, especially given the MCA activities. Planas agreed and pointed out that two thirds of Spanish aid to Morocco went to the northern part of the country.

Narcotics

¶10. (SBU) Planas noted that Spain was developing plans to promote tobacco production in Larache province (between Rabat and Tangiers) as a way of promoting alternatives to narcotics cultivation in northern Morocco.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley